

# **NDPS Certification Program Field Project Report**

## **Graduation Begins in Kindergarten: A Multi-Tiered Collaborative Approach to Improving the Graduation Rate**

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***Key words:*** graduation counselor, academic advisement, wrap-around services, family engagement, community resources, credit recovery, extended learning opportunities, Teachers as Advisors

**Project Location or Site:**

Elementary, Middle and High Schools

**Name of Project Director or Responsible Individual(s):**

- Dr. Alicia Dunn (Facilitate, Implement, Monitor and Evaluate)
- School Counseling Specialists
- Elementary School Counselors
- Middle School Counselors
- Graduation Counselors
- School Social Workers
- Elementary, Middle and High School Graduation Rate Improvement Teams

**Funding Source:**

Local Education Agency’s General Fund

**Project Cost and Budget Narrative:**

Figure 1.0

<i>Academic Year Program</i>	<b>Item</b>	<b>Year 1</b>	<b>Year 2</b>
	<b>Professional Learning Focus</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dropout Prevention, Solution Focused Counseling, Parental Engagement, Life Path, Social and Emotional Learning, Field Trips</li> <li>• Counseling At-risk Students,</li> </ul>	\$30,000.00	\$20,000.00
	<b>9<sup>th</sup> Grade Graduation Counselor</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Grade Graduation Counselor will provide intervention services to support the academic, personal/social and post-secondary needs to 9th grade students identified as needing additional support services.</li> <li>• (\$68,000, including benefits – 9<sup>th</sup> Grade Graduation Counselors/Social Workers)</li> </ul>	\$544,000.00	\$612,000.00

**Scope and Setting**

The entire district served as the setting due to the collaborative nature and the need to improve the graduation rate holistically. From its inception, the focus was that of the secondary high school. However, as time progressed and with the increase in the enrollment of older students in elementary and middle schools, it was determined their inclusion in this effort was non-negotiable. The issues that the students faced did not begin when they entered high school but rather much earlier and support was needed across grade levels to ensure the sustainability of the efforts to improve graduation rates for years to come. Therefore, the setting expanded to include students from feeder elementary and middle schools.

## **Staffing Pattern of the Project:**

School Site Based Collaborative Teams:

### **Elementary School Promotion/Graduation Rate Improvement Team:**

- Principal/Assistant Principal
- Classroom Teacher(s) (One Teacher Per Grade Level)
- Special Education Teacher
- ESOL Teacher
- Elementary School Counselor
- Parent Liaison
- School Social Worker
- School Psychologist (Addition 1/2017)

### **Middle School Promotion/Graduation Rate Improvement Team:**

- Principal/Assistant Principal
- Classroom Teacher(s)
- Special Education Teacher
- ESOL Teacher
- Middle School Counselor
- Parent Liaison
- School Social Worker
- School Psychologist (Addition 1/2017)

### **High School Graduation Rate Improvement Teams:**

- Principal/Assistant Principal
- Classroom Teacher(s)
- Special Education Teacher
- ESOL Teacher
- Graduation Counselor
- School Counselor
- Parent Liaison
- School Social Worker
- School Psychologist (Addition 1/2017)

## **Population of Students Served by the Project:**

At the elementary and middle school levels all students benefit from the support programs and interventions designed to bring awareness; likewise, to promote student achievement by beginning with the end in mind, with the end being graduation. The goal is to make graduation a reality to the students by involving them in hands-on career and college focused initiatives. For example, the kindergarten students participate in college tours while the fifth grade students learn about the hospitality industry from local hotels. Students experience first-hand the reality that awaits them when they graduate from high school.

The support becomes more focused and targeted as student achievement data is reviewed. Through the analysis of school data, teams are able to focus their efforts on students who begin to exhibit a need for additional support to be successful in school. In most instances, these are overage students ranging between the ages of 13 in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade to 20 in the 11<sup>th</sup> grade. The total number is inclusive of English Learners, special education, foster care, teen parents and homeless youth. Students vary in terms of socio-economic backgrounds; however, they are all in need of wraparound services to ensure their success in school.

Students are selected based upon the following criteria:

- Deficient in graduation credits
- Retention
- Display poor/irregular attendance/truancy
- Display frequent behavior challenges as determined through Positive Behavior Interventions and Support or the Multi-Tiered System of Support
- Transiency
- Struggle in reading and mathematics
- Disengaged from school
- Family Crisis or Illness
- Foster Care

### **Project Origination:**

During the 2011-2012 school year and in years prior, the need to provide students with additional supports became overwhelming evident with the declining graduation rate along with the increase in the dropout rate. Additionally, it was determined that more than one form of support would be necessary to realize any significant changes in student performance across grade levels. In addition to the previously mentioned, there existed a need to develop a culture that would ensure that supports would be sustainable. In response to the previously mentioned, brainstorming and professional development began to prepare to create a tiered approach to meeting the needs of students in danger of dropping out of high school.

To ensure that the appropriate targets were addressed, it was determined that data would chart the course for the support provided. The following data elements were reviewed to ensure that appropriate supports to create a learning environment conducive to the needs of an at-risk student population would be in place. The following data elements were reviewed:

- Demographic
- Enrollment & Withdrawal
- Achievement
- Attendance
- Truancy
- Discipline
- Perception

Each data element possessed the ability to provide a vivid picture of the areas in need of improvement.

## Issues/Needs Addressed

- Chronic Absenteeism
- Suspension Rate
- Retention/Failure
- Literacy
- Teenage Pregnancy
- Lack of Motivation
- Family Engagement
- Community Resources
- Truancy

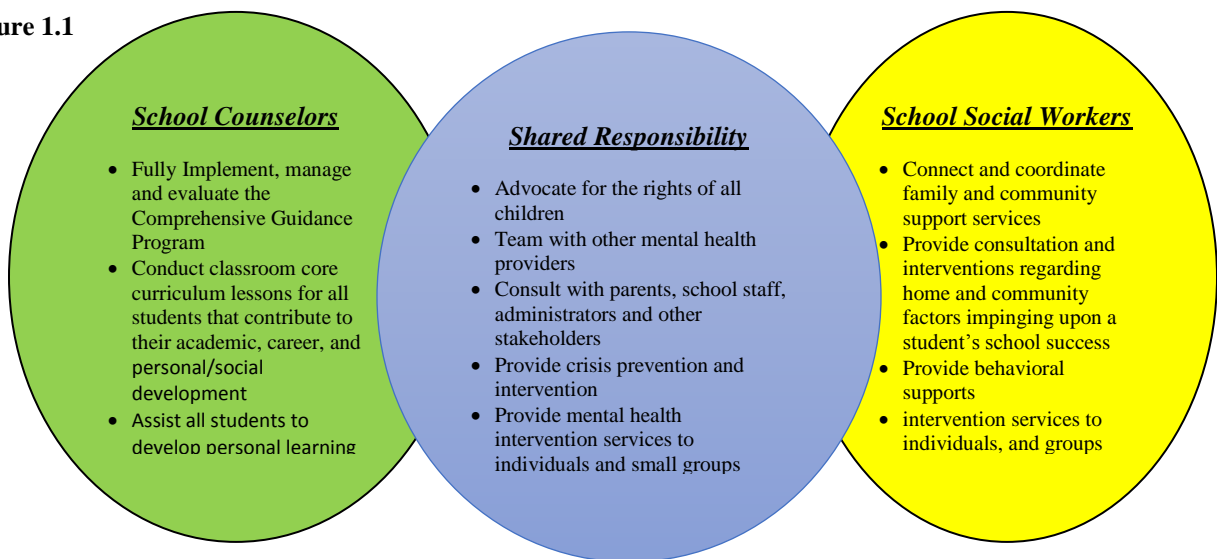
## Desired & Outcomes Measurable Objectives

- Decrease the dropout rate by 10% over a three year period
- Increase the graduation rate by 10% over a three year period

## Strategies and/or Interventions

Figure 1.1 reflects the collaborative multi-tiered approach created to work with identified students who are at risk of failure. This approach is necessary due to the variety of factors that hinder student progress.

Figure 1.1



Adapt from the Missouri Comprehensive School Counseling Plan

The following strategies and interventions were utilized to begin the journey toward realizing the desired outcomes and measurable objectives:

- **Academic Advisement**: Assist students in improving their academic performance and reengagement in school through individual advisement. Academic advisement will take place eight times per school year, and it will provide an opportunity to monitor the academic and social performance of all students continually.
- **Direct and Indirect Student Support and Case Management**: Develop and implement individual, small group, and whole school intervention and prevention strategies to provide academic support and enrichment to improve academic performance. Implement programs to improve students' classroom behavior and social skills.
- **Community Involvement**: Develop partnerships with community organizations to support the goals of the Graduation Begins in Kindergarten initiative, the 9<sup>th</sup> grade Graduation Counselor, and the site based Graduation Teams.
- **Family Engagement**: Foster stronger relationships with families for support of students through parent universities and workshops.
- **Peer Involvement**: Peer Tutoring & Peer Mentoring
- **Caring Adult/Mentor**: Assign adult advocates to students in need of additional support services as a part of the Teachers-As-Advisors program.
- **Time Management**: Utilize a daily schedule to aid students in understanding how to effectively manage their time
- **Transitions Programs**: Programs designed to aid the transition from 5<sup>th</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> grades.

### **Project Timeline**

- August to June of each school year

### **Special Conditions and/or Expertise Required to Carry Out the Project**

- American Association for School Counseling's National Model for School Counseling
- Data Usage/Analysis
- Dropout Prevention/Intervention Strategies
- Elementary to Middle and Middle to High School Transition
- Multi-Tiered Systems of Support
- Positive Behavioral Intervention System
- Response to Intervention
- Student Support Team

## **Outcomes and Achievements**

Graduation Begins in Kindergarten has proven to be a monumental holistic measure that has begun to change the culture district wide. Each year over 500 kindergarten students tour college/university campuses throughout the metropolitan area. The exposure to post-secondary options has proven successful each school year.

In addition, the dropout rate has steadily decreased since 2011 with a current dropout rate of 6.9%.

## **Current Status of the Project**

The efforts began to aid student achievement and to improve the overall graduation rate is ongoing. It is a continuous effort to ensure sustainability and consistent growth in the overall graduation rate from year to year with a decrease in the dropout rate, as well.

## **Role in Project as a NDPS Certification Program Participant**

Due to the decrease in the graduation rate and the number of residents without a high school diploma in the area, it was determined additional support was needed and a sense of urgency emerged to turn the page toward a better future for students. My efforts as the facilitator became focused and multifaceted. They began with Graduation Begins in Kindergarten and continued through middle school and high school. As the facilitator, the focus became the design and implementation of the plan and progress monitoring. The facilitator led the initiative and fostered a multi-tiered approach to improving the graduation rate. Each student received individualized attention and support service resources that extended beyond the course of the school day. Additionally, through the facilitators' direct involvement, high schools developed a vertically aligned team approach and added the addition of support services to improve the overall graduate rate.

## References

Gysbers, N. C., & Henderson, P. (2011). *Developing and managing your school Guidance and Counseling program* (5th ed.). Alexandria, VA: American Counseling Association.

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